JAMES EVANS

IT HAS often happened that men who have gone out as missionaries of the churches have performed, along with their religious duties, other services which have made them benefactors of all mankind. Many names come to mind all the way from St. Paul down to Xavier, Chinese Gordon, David Livingstone and others well-known in the present. Among these illustrious heroes of the faith Canada alone could contribute an imposing *Book of the Saints.*

No missionary in Canada is better entitled to a lasting regard than James Evans, "the man who taught birch bark how to talk." A committee of citizens in Winnipeg, composed of all creeds, was organized in 1925 to honour the work of this man in some adequate memorial. Fitting it is that he who rendered a national service shall receive a truly national recognition.

James Evans was born in Kingston-upon-Hull, England, January 18, 1801.

His father was captain of a merchant ship, and was on a trip to Cronstadt in the Baltic when James was born. War was threatened against England, and Captain Evans with his crew were for a time detained as prisoners by the Russian authorities. Czar Paul was assassinated and one of the immediate results was that the embargo upon the captive seamen was removed.

Before Captain Evans arrived home, Mary Evans, the mother of the babe, had him christened in the Carthruse Wesleyan Methodist Church, and he was given the name James, after his god-fearing father.

James grew up in Kingston-upon-Hull, and, as was natural, desired to go to sea. His father, however, had seen the unpleasant side of a seaman's life, and while he did not protest against his son's choice of a career, he quietly made his plans to disillusion the boy. Accordingly, when James was but eight years old, his father took



JAMES EVANS, ACCOMPANIED BY HIS INDIAN GUIDE AND INTERPRETER, MAKES A SHORT CALL ON A CREE CAMP AMONG THE LAKES OF NORTHERN MANITOBA. USING A BIRCH TREE FOR A "BLACKBOARD," HE TEACHES THEM A VERSE OF SCRIPTURE. EVANS WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED AS "THE MAN WHO TAUGHT BIRCHBARK HOW TO TALK."

him on two long voyages, one to Dantzig, and the other to Copenhagen. The trips were rough and the life anything but ideal. The result was that James turned his attention in other directions.

Sometime later Captain Evans commanded the troop ship *Triton*, bound for the Mediterranean. He took with him his wife and youngest son, while James and Ephraim, the eldest, were sent to a boarding school. James remained at the Lincolnshire school until he was fifteen.

After leaving school James was apprenticed to a grocer in his home town. As was frequently the case, the employer took his help to board, and in this instance it was fortunate for James. The grocer was an official in the Wesleyan church, and as he attended all the preaching services and other meetings with regularity, James felt that it was also his duty to be punctual at "the means of grace." On one occasion Gideon Ouseley, a celebrated Irish mission-

ary, visited the Methodist church for the purpose of interesting the English Methodists in Ouseley's struggling Irish churches. As he listened to the impassioned eloquence of the Irishman, Evans was greatly moved, and then and there made his own choice of the Christian way of life.

The early Methodist societies had what was known as "the plan." By this arrangement every layman who so desired, and had the ability, was made a leader in some such enterprise as preaching, visitation, conducting of prayer or Bible-study groups, and other religious duties. In this way, although ordained ministers were few and far apart, the many tasks of teaching, poor relief, and other duties in the rapidly expanding Methodist bodies, did not suffer, for the laymen gladly offered to serve where best they could.

Therefore, as soon as James Evans had expressed the wish, he was placed upon

"the plan" among the prayer-leaders. Having served his apprenticeship in this capacity, he was raised to the rank of a local preacher. A layman could hope for no greater honour than this. Whatever endowments he possessed were all required, as he went out on week nights and Sundays to the villages around, explaining the Scriptures as he understood them, and pointing out the Jesus way of life as he himself had experienced it.

James Evans was in the prime of his youth when his family emigrated to Canada, settling at Lachute, Quebec. He continued to work in London, in a glass and crockery concern, for another two years, and then joined his family. One month after his arrival he accepted a position as school teacher near L'Orignal. No special certificates or examination were then required of a teacher; the main virtues a teacher was supposed to possess were, a liking of books,

I. INITIALS OR PRIMALS.

			
ā	ē	ō	ī

II. SYLLABICS.

			
pā	pē	pō	pī
			
tā	tē	tō	tī
			
chā	chē	chō	chī
kā	kē	kō	kī
mā	mē	mō	mī
			
nā	nē	nō	nī
			
sā	sē	sō	sī
			
yā	yē	yō	yī

III. FINALS OR TERMINALS.

ᖁ = m	ᖏ = k	ᖐ = w
ᖅ = n	ᖑ = p	ᖓ = r
ᖆ = s	ᖕ = t	ᖔ = l
ᖊ = h	ᖖ = aspirate	ᖕᖐ = ow
	ᙯ = Christ	

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

ᑲᑎᐯᓂᖅᑭᓵᐅᖅ ᑕᒪᒋᐊᓕᓐᓄᑦ

ᓄᕈᓐᓄᑦ ᑭᖅᑭᑭᓗᙯ ᐁᐊᒋᓂᑦ, ᑭᕈᑭᑌᓂᖅᓯᒃᓄᑦ ᑭᐃᓕᐅᐃᓄᑦ;

ᑭᑐᑌᓐᓇᐃᓄᑦ ᑭᕈᐃᓄᑦᑎᒋᖅᓯᓂᓐᓄ; ᐁᐃᑌᓂᖅᒪᒪ ᕈᐃᓄᐃᑭᑦ ᑕᕈ ᐊᖏᕆᙯ ᑲᐃᓗ ᐃᖅᑭᙯ ᑭᓗᙯ.

ᒥᓂᓐᓄᑦ ᐊᓄᖅ ᑲᑭᓗᒃᑐ ᑫ ᑕᖅᑭ ᐱᒪᑎᓂᒋᙵ.

ᐁᑲᐃᓐᒋ ᐱᓗᖏᑫᓂᖅᑭ ᓂᒪᑎᑎ ᒍᐃᓐᓂᓈᓐᓇ, ᑫ ᐃᓗ ᐁᑲ ᐱᓗᖏᑫ ᓂᖅᒥᒍ ᑲᒪᑎᒍᑯᐃᓐᒋᙵ;

ᒪᒥᔪᓂᓈᓐᓄᑦ ᑭᑎᐁᑲᒪᑎᑎᒍᒻᒪᙵ; ᕿᑎᐱᒻᒋᐊᒪᓕᐃᓐᓈᓐᓄᑦ ᑲᓪᓚᑦ:

ᑭᓴ ᑎᑎᑌᓐᓇᐃᓄᑦ, ᒥᓇ ᓄᓇᑲᓗᓐᓇᐃᓄᑦ, ᒥᓇ ᑭᓪᓚᓂᐃᓐᓄᑦ, ᑲᑭᑫ, ᒥᓇ ᑲᑭᑫ· ᐁᒃᓴ.

and the ability to keep order. Indeed some teachers occasionally used a book to help preserve order!

While teaching at L'Orignal James Evans met Mary Blithe Smith, and, after a brief courtship, they were married. Two years after their marriage, about 1825, they migrated a little to the westward along the St. Lawrence, and settled near Augusta. It was while attending a camp-meeting at Augusta that Evans again felt his heart warmed, and again he resolved to use whatever talents he possessed in the service of his God. This was fortunately an experience in which his young wife also joined. The faith of the one strengthened the faith of the other. Whatever the future might demand of them they could face it triumphantly and together.

In 1799 a young surveyor by the name of Nathan Bangs came up from the United States to carry on his profession. He remained during his stay with his saintly

sister and her husband, and before long experienced a great change in his religious life. Following his spiritual awakening he felt impelled to preach, and accordingly, in 1802, became a circuit rider. Over all sorts of roads, in all kinds of weather, with few chapels and a scattered flock, his worldly possessions in his saddle bags, the preacher made his way. The loneliness of the trail was frequently beguiled with a book, and the hardships of the seasons were forgotten in the warm welcome to the firesides of the simple, hardworking backwoodsmen. He carried little money, for he received little; yet his rewards were great, as we shall see.

Nathan Bangs remained in Canada a few years and then returned to the United States, where he became one of the great leaders of his church, and ultimately its historian. To the end of his days he preserved his interest in the spread of the Gospel among the Indians, and to him be-

longs a great deal of the honour in bringing this important work to the attention of the Methodist Church in Canada.

The intelligent interest of Nathan Bangs in the physical and spiritual welfare of the Indian was later shared by William Case, who became the great missioner to the Indians. It was he who put the task of Indian Missions solidly on its feet. He conceived the work to be something more than erecting meeting houses, and conducting worship; it must minister to the full needs of the people. So it was that William Case went through Canadian Methodism, raising money and finding men, in order that he might build schools, train his preachers and teachers, instruct the children, provide literature, develop manual and industrial training, and so assist the Indian to become a god-fearing, intelligent, self supporting and respectable part of the nation.

Some of those men whom William Case discovered and trained are: James Evans,

inventor of the Cree Syllabic; George McDougall, "the missionary-martyr of the Saskatchewan," and father of John McDougall, "McDougall of Alberta"; Henry B. Steinhauer, translator of the Bible into the Cree language; Peter Jones, native Indian preacher, translator and author; John Sunday, native Indian chief, orator and missionary. This list might well be extended, but it serves to show how well William Case planned and how wisely he chose.

At the Methodist Conference in July, 1821, William Case was appointed, together with four others, as a "Committee on Indian Affairs." Before he could make any definate plans, the Rev. Alvin Torry made a visit to the Six Nations Indians at Grand River. Returning from his visit he met Case, and the meeting was providential. Case had the money and promised to send a missionary to the Indians; but no suitable man; and lo! here was a man trained and ready to go. Alvin Torry had the honour

of being the first missionary to the Indians in the Methodist Church of Canada, and the Grand River Mission was the first Methodist Indian Mission in Canada. Peter Jones, whom we have already mentioned, and his sister, were among the first converts at this mission.

The missionary work, so well begun among the Indian tribes, flourished and attracted the attention of the churches in Canada and the United States. When the recurring Missionary Anniversaries were held, it was the custom to have appear on the platform, along with the church officers, some eloquent convert among the Indians. Their simple, sincere confessions of faith made a profound impression upon the audiences, and not only tremendously increased the interest in the splendid work among the Indians, but prompted liberal offerings of money, and inspired many to volunteer for the ministry of the church. When the Conference met near Hull's Corners, a short

distance from Cobourg on Lake Ontario, the Indians of Rice Lake Reserve, some twelve miles to the north, were invited to attend. Many of them came, and this opened the way for Peter Jones to visit them. A church was built and they even permitted their kinsman to promote scientific agriculture among them. When the autumn came they urged Peter Jones to organize a school for them, and this was done during the winter.

Two years after his religious awakening at Augusta, James Evans became the school teacher at Rice Lake. His success was immediate. Possessed with a love of learning, he was now even more possessed with a love of men. He studied Ojibway, the language of the Rice Lake Indians, and before long was able, not only to translate portions of the Scriptures into Ojibway, but to address them with a degree of fluency.

James Evans was received on probation for the Methodist Ministry at Kingston, Ontario, August 17, 1830, and was ap-

pointed minister of the Rice Lake and Mud Lake Tribes. As if this were not enough, before the year was over he had to assume charge of the Cavan Circuit as well, which had seventeen appointments.

In this year Upper Canada Academy was established at Cobourg, as a school of higher education for the Province, and also for the purpose of training ministers for the Methodist Church. The institution was later incorporated as Victoria University.

William Case had been successful in his visit to the United States, and returned with funds which permitted him to proceed with the translation and publication of the Scriptures. In this he was assisted by Peter Jones, James Evans and Thomas Hurlburt. The work suceeded beyond their fondest expectation. Five Indian Reserves had been organized by the church, comprising some ten tribes, with sixteen schools, employing seventeen missionaries, nine of them natives! Five great reserves yet remained,

and William Case set diligently to work to harvest these also for the faith. And as he worked this prophecy rang in his ears:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The most successful missionary undertaking of the time was that conducted at the Credit. This work was the result of the personal attention of William Case himself, who gathered about him the best missionary ability of his day. We have seen that Peter Jones accepted Christianity here among his own people, and this fact, together with his earnest efforts on behalf of his own people, caused the work of the church to thrive. Egerton Ryerson, later the first President of Victoria College, and founder of the Methodist Book and Publishing House, and finally as Superintendent of Education for Ontario, founding the educational system in Ontario, was a missionary here for some time. He built a church at

the mission from funds he himself raised. Two of his brothers were later missionaries there also.

James Evans was sent to the Credit in 1831. The splendid work he had begun in translating the Scriptures into the Indian language, was here carried forward to fresh success. In addition to his translations he ministered to the Indians, and also to the white settlements close to the reserve. The following year he was sent to Ancaster as missionary in charge. Ancaster, as we know, was where Peter Jones forsook the religion of his fathers for Christianity. This mission included a considerable territory, part of which is now the city of Hamilton. Associated with him was Edwy Ryerson. Together they were most successful, not only in winning such converts as Edward and Lydia Jackson, afterwards among the builders of Methodism in Ontario, but also in combatting heresies.

When Conference met the following year,

James Evans was stationed at St. Catharines with John Baxter as his assistant. He had been ordained and was now received into full ministerial connection.

While Egerton Ryerson was fighting the Family Compact, and winning the battles of democracy through his courageous speeches, as well as by his scathing articles in *The Christian Guardian*, the oldest religious journal in Canada, such men as William Case, James Evans and others were fighting a no less important battle on the frontiers of civilization in Upper Canada. Evans was a born warrior. Those were the days when men had to believe in a few simple things, and everlastingly battle for them. To-day we may think them narrow and even bigoted. But it is difficult for us to understand what forces were arrayed against them or how bitter and unscrupulous they frequently became. To overcome this one had to concentrate on a single and definite objective, and, though it meant the

parting of neighbours and friends, stake everything for the cause. That was the way free education, the rights of minorities, the freedom of the press, equal rights among the churches, in fact nearly everything we value as citizens of a democracy, were fought for and won in those stern and bitter days.

James Evans was born for the times. He was a man of high ideals. He believed intensely in truth, freedom and righteousness, and between these high goals of his endeavour, and those things which defeat his purpose, he ran a line of fire. The closing years of Evans' work in Ontario were marked by such splendid courage and ability, that he was marked for the greatest opportunity of service the church had to bestow.

The Indian Mission along the St. Clair river was in a bad way. The Indians were more than ordinarily superstitious, immoral and debauched, and the missionary had been unable to cope with the trying situation.

James Evans therefore was sent, and the change was striking. Fluent in their tongue, and with his translations of the Bible and many hymns, he inspired respect at once. In addition to this his passionate love for his work, and his resolute personality, convinced the St. Clair tribe that he was there for business. The effect was almost instantaneous. A sweeping revival seemed to work a miracle in the life of the tribe, and the untiring pastoral work of the missionary made these gains permanent. For many a year his successors recorded the fact, that drunkenness and immorality had practically disappeared. Evans not only preached on the Canadian side, but crossed over to the United States territory along the river, preaching his good news everywhere.

Meanwhile, the work that Evans, Jones, Case and others had been doing in translating the Scriptures was nearing completion. When the Conference of the Church met in 1837, Evans was commis-

sioned to proced to New York for the purpose of having the translations printed. While there he was met by Peter Jones on his way home from England. Almost four months were required for the publication of books. Writing to his wife he says: "My spelling book has cost me $151 and a few cents printing; the hymns, $554.91, and the Music $1,000, all of which, with my little bill of expenses here and travelling, will exceed a York sixpence. I'm as poor as a church mouse . . . I was seven or eight weeks with not twenty-five cents to spend. That was providential, wasn't it?"

Scarcely had James Evans successfully completed this great task, when the church sent him, together with Thomas Hurlburt, to the Indians in the Lake Superior district. That was in 1838, the year of the Rebellion in Lower Canada. The work there had been in charge of John Sunday and Peter Jones, and so excellent beginnings had already been made. Evans spent the winter

and spring among the Indian camps along the shores of Lake Superior, and returned to Ontario in the summer of 1839, being stationed at Guelph. Here he laboured for one year, and then turned his face towards the prairies. Writing to his wife the year before he had said:

"I feel perfectly resigned to the leadings of Providence. God, who has hitherto directed our steps, is too wise to err and too good to be unkind, and I can say without a fear of the consequences, 'Where He appoints I go.' "

The story of the progress of the Church on the plains is a romance without parallel. In the Readers in this series on John McDougall, Father Lacombe, and John Black, you may read some of the finest records of heroism written into the annals of our Dominion. The West was a huge empire, but an empire uncharted, and all but unknown. The dangers of a hostile climate were matched by the enmity of the savages.

None but those stout of body and indomitable of heart need hope to brave those wilds for peltries or for souls. But just as the unknown has always held the greatest fascination for men, so the dangerous has ever challenged the courageous. Into the West, therefore, in the spring of 1840 James Evans went accompanied by three young missionaries from England, G. Barnley, W. Mason and Robert Terrill Rundle. The man who was destined to be the first missionary of any church to reach the present site of Edmonton, was this Rundle.

James Evans was appointed Missionary Superintendent and was stationed at Norway House, which had been established in 1819 by a party of Norwegians. The mission was four hundred miles north of Winnipeg, and on the water highway between Winnipeg and James Bay. Boats bound for Athabasca and Mackenzie River also passed this way.

Rundle arrived at Norway House two

months before Evans, and lost no time in setting out for his distant field in Alberta. Evans spent the first few months getting acquainted with his work and teaching the Indian children. His knowledge of their language promised success from the beginning. In the spring he set to work to erect his mission on a small island in Playgreen Lake, two miles distant from the Fort. Donald Ross, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, gave Evans great assistance, and as a pretty compliment the missionary named the new mission station Rossville after the Factor. Although the timber had to be felled and squared, it was not long before there was a school, church and parsonage, with a little plot cleared and a garden started.

The mission became instantly popular. Not only could Evans converse with the Indians, but his enthusiasm for his work among them was contagious. His love of music was another element in his success,

and it is little wonder that his school, as well as his church services, were crowded

Evans had the responsibility of supervising the other western missions, and, when his own work was well under way, off he set to Oxford House, York Factory, Nelson House, Fort Pitt, Fort Chippewyan, then on to Lesser Slave Lake and Dunvegan! His only means of travel was by canoe, in which he took his full share of paddling with his Indians. Dangers of every kind awaited him, but he passed unharmed.

The principal tribe among which he laboured were the Crees, a branch of the Algonquin family, who called themselves Naheyowuk, the exact people. Being fluent in the Ojibway language, a dialect of the Cree, Evans soon mastered the language of his people. Not content merely to speak the language, he set himself the task of translating the Scriptures and hymns as he had in Ontario.

The year 1841 is important, for it was in that year that Evans completed the Cree Syllabic, the alphabet of the Cree Indians, one of the most important achievements by any scholar of any time. This is not the place to explain the Cree alphabet. It is sufficient to say that it laid the foundation of education among the Indian tribes of the plains, making available in their own language the Scriptures, and the great hymns of the churches. The Evans Cree Syllabic System contains less than fifty characters, and those who have taught it declare that it can be mastered in an hour.

Having invented the alphabet his next problem was to procure a printing press and type. The Hudson's Bay Company feared that the introduction of printing would make the Indians restless. But Evans was determined to see his purpose accomplished. At first he had cut birch bark into small sheets, and with ink made of chimney soot, wrote hymns and Bible verses on them. But this

was not satisfactory. Accordingly, after having made his models from wood blocks with a jack-knife, he gathered lead linings from old tea chests, melted it and molded it into type. He later cut more type with his knife from musket bullets. A crude hand press was fitted up, then ink was again made from chimney soot, while birch bark still served for paper! Thus was begun the first printing press in the North-West!

Later on a small press was sent out from England. Among the most precious souvenirs preserved in Victoria College Library, Toronto, are some of these early type made from tea lead and bullets, and a copy of the first book. "The cutting up of bullets for the forming of type, with which to reproduce on the printed page the lesson of the Sermon on the Mount, was surely a real case of turning spears into pruning hooks and swords into ploughshares."

When the press and type came from Eng-

land Evans had to promise that they would only be used for missionary work. On these terms alone would the Directors of the Hudson's Bay Company agree to present the press and type to the mission. At first Evans did most of the work himself, but later the Indians could set type, and print portions of the Scriptures as well as hymns.

Lord Dufferin, Governor General of Canada many years afterward, when told of James Evans' great work by another missionary, Dr. Egerton Ryerson Young, said:

"Why, Mr. Young, what a blessing to humanity is the man who invented that alphabet. I profess to be a kind of literary man myself, and try to keep up my reading of what is going on, but I never heard of this before. The fact is, the nation has given many a man a title, and a pension, and then a resting-place and a monument

in Westminster Abbey, who never did half so much for his fellow-creatures."

The syllabics invented by James Evans were adopted by Protestant and Catholic alike, and as time went on were adapted to the language of other tribes. Before long every tribe on the plains was provided with Bibles, cathechisms, hymn-books and other religious literature, besides text-books. In less than a decade, James Evans had placed books in the hands of the Indians (in their own language). The little printing press at Norway House was the first in the whole North-West. At Victoria College may be seen copies of these small, crude, books covered with deerskin, containing hymns and passages from the Bible, bearing this imprint; *Norway House*, 1841.

James Evans returned to England for a brief visit in 1846, where, without warning, his spirit took leave of his restless body at Keilby, Lincolnshire, November 23, 1846.

The difficulties which Evans had to overcome were almost superhuman. Nature seemed to be allied against him. The resources at his command were poor indeed. The opposition he had to face from the Company and others made the greatest demands upon him. Yet his colossal courage and faith carried him through. Soot, tea lead, birch bark, how they remind one of Browning's line "Out of three sounds I make not a fourth sound but a star!"